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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 001330

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TAGS: PREL PINR IR JA

SUBJECT: IRANIAN STRATEGIC COUNCIL MEMBER SHARIAT-MADARI
VISITS JAPAN

REF: A. TOKYO 799

¶B. TOKYO 973

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Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Mohammed Shariat-Madari, a member of Iran's five-person Strategic Council for Foreign Relations, visited Japan March 8-19 and was told by all interlocutors that Iran must comply with the will of the international community and adhere to the requirements of UNSCR 1737. According to MOFA officials, the consistent message he received was that Iran should hold negotiations on its nuclear program without preconditions and that now is a golden opportunity for Tehran to engage with the West. Shariat-Madari replied that Iran is ready to negotiate but that increased pressure, including the threat of another UNSCR, is arousing "extreme reactions" inside his country. Tokyo views Shariat-Madari as a highly placed moderate voice who reports directly to Supreme Leader Khamenei, over the head of President Ahmadinejad. It sponsored his Japan visit in part to ensure that Tokyo's message on the nuclear issue reaches Khamenei. END SUMMARY.

AN INFLUENTIAL MODERATE VOICE?

¶2. (C) Shariat-Madari, a former Minister of Commerce and presently one of five members of Iran's Strategic Council for Foreign Relations, visited Japan under the auspices of MOFA's "Opinion Leader" program, which brings leading foreign personalities to Japan. Japan's goal in hosting him was to convey a unified message on Iran's need to comply with the will of the international community and to familiarize him more with the country, according to MOFA Second Middle East Division Principal Deputy Director Motosada Matano. As a moderate advisor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, Japan hoped Shariat-Madari would be able to convey this message directly to Khamenei, without it being filtered through President Ahmadinejad.

¶3. (C) While in Tokyo, Shariat-Madari had a three-hour dinner meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Yabunaka. He also met with Foreign Minister Aso, METI Senior Vice Minister (and Diet member) Hiromichi Watanabe and members of the Japan-Iran

Parliamentary Friendship League, former Minister of Justice Mayumi Moriyama being the senior-most member present. According to Matano, the Japanese were careful to ensure that Shariat-Madari heard the same message from all interlocutors. In addition to meetings in Tokyo, Shariat-Madari traveled to the Osaka-Kyoto-Nara region. He was accompanied by his wife and by Mahmoud Farazandeh, reportedly a former Iranian Ambassador to Uganda.

MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER ASO

¶14. (C) FM Aso, according to Matano, reiterated to Shariat-Madari the same message that has been given to FM Motaki and DFM Araghchi (reftels): Iran should comply with UNSCR 1737 and enter into negotiations on its nuclear program without preconditions; now is the right time for such a move.

The fact the United States is talking directly to North Korea demonstrates the West's willingness to diplomatically negotiate nuclear issues, Aso told Shariat-Madari. Once North Korea agreed to talk, things began to move forward rapidly. This is in contrast to the situation Iran currently finds itself in, with tensions constantly on the rise. FM Aso also told Shariat-Madari that, although only a minor encounter, the fact Americans and Iranians had met and spoken at the recent Neighbors Conference in Baghdad should also be taken as a positive sign.

¶15. (C) Iran is ready to negotiate on the nuclear issue, Shariat-Madari replied, but further pressure on this is leading to "extreme reactions" inside his country. Iran cannot accept the suspension of its uranium enrichment program as a precondition to talks, and the adoption of another UNSCR would not help to solve the problem.

¶16. (C) FM Aso raised with Shariat-Madari Iranian President

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Ahmadinejad's inflammatory comments about Israel, said Matano. Shariat-Madari replied that he, too, found them troubling and did not agree with them, and joked that he shouldn't be saying this in front of the Iranian Ambassador, who was also present and pretended to plug his ears.

DINNER WITH VICE FOREIGN MINISTER

¶17. (C) Shariat-Madari was the guest for a dinner hosted by MOFA's Deputy Minister for Political Affairs Mitoji Yabunaka, which was also attended by Director General for Middle Eastern and African Affairs Norihiro Okuda. Yabunaka made the same points as Aso, reported Matano, who was present at both meetings. The main points highlighted were that Iran should note the subtle changes in relations between the United States and North Korea in the Six-Party talks and that Tehran should take the bold decision to suspend uranium enrichment and open negotiations with the West. Yabunaka offered Japan's assistance in facilitating talks with the West, and underlined that the advice Tokyo was offering was coming from a long-term friend of Iran. That said, Japan and Iran could not remain friends on the nuclear issue as long as Iran continues to defy the international community.

VISIT TO KYOTO AND NARA

¶18. (C) In addition to his Tokyo meetings, Shariat-Madari was also Japan's guest for three days - March 14-17 - in the Kyoto/Nara region, where he was hosted by MOFA Ambassador-at-Large in Kansai Kishichiro Amae, himself a former Director General for Middle Eastern and African Affairs. Amae told Osaka Consul General that Shariat-Madari had impressed him as quite flexible and moderate in his

thinking. Shariat-Madari indicated to him that he privately saw value in developing a dialogue with the United States now, during the Bush Administration, "before the Democrats take over the White House." Shariat-Madari "thought out loud" that perhaps Japan could take the initiative to lead three-way talks on the peaceful use of nuclear energy that would presumably offer a framework for sorting out concerns over Iran's program. Amae said his experience with Shariat-Madari validated MOFA's belief that, in addition to being very influential in Tehran, Shariat-Madari is potentially an important moderating counter-weight to President Ahmadinejad's radicalism. Amae offered to host a lunch between Consul General and Shariat-Madari, but Consul General declined the invitation pursuant to Department policy on contacts with Iranian government officials.

BIO NOTES

19. (C) Matano told Political Officer that Shariat-Madari was very friendly and easy-going. His meetings were punctuated with jokes and laughter, and talking with him "was just like talking with Americans." But despite this, Matano reported that Shariat-Madari had what the Japanese call "gandiki" - very intense eyes that convey a sense of strength and conviction. He spoke limited English, but had full confidence in his interpreter who, according to the Japanese interpreter, didn't miss a word.

SCHIEFFER